

The remenant of the tale is long ynough:
I wol nat letten eek noon of this route;
Lat every felawe telle his tale aboute,
And lat se now who shal the soper wynne,
And ther I lefte, I wol ageyne bigynne.

THIS duc, of whom I make mencion,
Whan he was come almoost unto the toun,
In al his wele, and in his mooste pride,
He was war, as he caste his eye aside,
Where that ther kneled in the hye weye
A compaignye of ladyes, tweye and tweye,
Ech after oother clad in clothes blake;
But swich a cry and swich a wo they make,
That in this world nys creature lvyng,
That herde swich another waymentynge:
And of this cry they nolde nevere stenten,
Til they the reynes of his brydel henten.
What folk been ye, that at myn hom comynge
Perturben so my feste with cryng?
Quod Theseus: Have ye so greet envye
Of myn honour, that thus compleyne and crye?
Or who hath yow mysboden or offended?
And telleth me if it may been amended;
And why that ye been clothed thus in blak?
The eldest lady of hem alle spak
Whan she hadde swowned with a deedly cheere,
That it was routhe for to seen and heere,
And seyde, Lord, to whom fortune hath yyven
Victorie, and as a conqueror to lyven,
Nat greveth us youre glorie and youre honour,
But we biseken mercy and socour.
Have mercy on oure wo and oure distresse;
Some drope of pitee, thurgh thy gentillesse,
Upon us wrecched wommen lat thou falle;
for certes, lord, there is noon of us alle
That she nath been a duchesse or a queene;
Now be we caytyves, as it is wel seene:
Chanked be fortune, and hire false wheel,
That noon estat assureth to be wel.
And certes, lord, to abyden youre presence,
Heere in the temple of the goddessse Clemence
We han ben waitynge al this fourtenyght;
Now help us, lord, sith it is in thy myght.
I wrecche, which that wepe and waille thus,
Was whilom wyf to kyng Cappaneus,
That starf at Thebes, cursed be that day;
And alle we that been in this array,
And maken al this lamentacioun,
We losten alle oure housbondes at that toun,
Whil that the seege therabout lay.
And yet the olde Creon, weylaway!
That lord is now of Thebes the citee,
fulfild of ire and of iniquitee,
He, for despit, and for his tyrannye,
To do the dede bodyes vileynye,
Of alle oure lordes, whiche that been slawe,
Hath alle the bodyes on an heepe ydrawe,
And wol nat suffren hem, by noon assent,
Neither to been yburyed nor ybrent,
But maketh houndes ete hem in despit.
And with that word, withouten moore respit,
They fillen gruf, and criden pitously,
Have on us wrecched wommen som mercy,

And lat oure sorwe synken in thyn herte.
This gentil duc down from his courser sterte
With herte pitous, whan he herde hem speke.
Hym thoughte that his herte wolde breke,
Whan he saugh hem so pitous and so maat,
That whilom weren of so greet estaat;
And in his armes he hem alle up hente,
And hem conforteth in ful good entente;
And swoor his ooth, as he was trewe knyght,
He wolde doon so ferforthly his myght
Upon the tiraunt Creon hem to wreke,
That al the peple of Grece sholde speke
How Creon was of Theseus yservyd,
As he that hadde his deeth ful wel deserved.

AND right anon, withouten moore abood,
His baner he desplayeth, and forth rood
To Thebesward, and al his hoost beside;
No neer Atthenes wolde he go ne ride,
Ne take his ese fully half a day,
But onward on his way that nyght he lay;
And sente anon Ypolita the queene,
And Emelye hir yonge suster sheene,
Unto the toun of Atthenes to dwelle,
And forth he rit; ther is namoore to telle.
The rede statue of Mars with spere and targe
So shyneth in his white baner large,
That alle the feeldes glyteren up and down;
And by his baner born is his penoun
Of gold ful riche, in which ther was ybete
The Mynotaur, which that he slough in Crete.

THAS rit this duc, thus rit this conquerour,
And in his hoost of chivalrie the flour,
Til that he cam to Thebes, and alighte
faire in a feeld, ther as he thoughte fighte.
But shortly for to speken of this thyng
With Creon, which that was of Thebes kyng,
He faught, and slough hym manly as a knyght
In pleyen bataille, and putte the folk to flyght;
And by assaut he wan the citee after,
And rente adoun bothe wall, and sparre, & rafter;
And to the ladyes he restored agayn
The bones of hir housbondes that were slayn,
To doon obsequies, as was tho the gyse.

BUT it were al to long for to devyse
The grete clamour and the waymentynge
Which that the ladyes made at the brennyng
Of the bodyes, and the grete honour
That Theseus, the noble conquerour,
Dooth to the ladyes whan they from hym wente.
But shortly for to telle is myn entente;
Whan that this worthy duc, this Theseus,
Hath Creon slayn, and wonne Thebes thus,
Stille in that feeld he took al nyght his reste,
And dide with al the contree as hym leste.

Oransake in the taas of bodyes dede,
Hem for to strepe of harneys and of wede,
The pilours didnen bisynesse and cure,
After the bataille and disconfiture.
And so bifel that in the taas they founde,
Thurghgirt with many a grevous bloody wounde,
Two yonge knyghtes, liggyng by and by,
Bothe in oon armes, wroght ful richely,
Of whiche two, Arcite highte that oon,

And that oother knyght highte Palamon.
Nat fully quyke, ne fully dede they were,
But by here cote armures, and by hir gere,
The heraudes knewe hem best in special,
As they that weren of the blood roial
Of Thebes, and of sustren two yborn.
Out of the taas the pilours han hem torn,
And han hem caried softe unto the tente
Of Theseus, and ful soone he hem sente
To Atthenes, to dwellen in prisoun
Perpetuelly; he nolde no raunsoun.
And whan this worthy duc hath thus ydon,
He took his hoost, and hoom he rood anon,
With laurer crowned as a conquerour;
And ther he lyveth in joye and in honour
Terme of his lyve; what nedeth wordes mo?
And in a tour, in angwissh and in wo,
This Palamon, and his felawe Arcite,
for evermoore, ther may no gold hem quite.

THIS passeth yere by yere, and day by day,
Till it fil ones, in a morwe of May,
That Emelye, that fairer was to sene
Than is the lylie upon his stalke grene,
And fressher than the May with floures newe,
for with the rose colour stroof hire hewe,
Inoot which was the fyner of hem two,
Er it were day, as was hir wone to do,
She was arisen, and al redy dight;
for May wole have no slogardrie anyght,
The sesoun priketh every gentil herte,
And maketh hym out of his slepe to sterte,
And seith Arys, and do thyn observaunce.
This maked Emelye have remembraunce
To doon honour to May, and for to ryse.
Yclothed was she fresshe, for to devyse;
hir yelow heer was broyded in a tresse
Bihynde hir bak a yerde long, I gesse.
And in the gardyn at the sonne upriste,
She walketh up and down, and as hire liste
She gadereth floures, party white and rede,
To make a subtil gerland for hire hede,
And as an aungel, hevenysshly she soong.

THE grete tour that was so thikke & stroong,
Which of the castel was the chief dongeon,
Theras the knyghtes weren in prisoun,
Of whiche I tolde yow, and tellen shal,
Was evene joynant to the gardyn wal,
Theras this Emelye hadde hir pleyynge.

BRIGHT was the sonne, and cleer that
morwenyng,
And Palamon, this woful prisoner,
As was his wone, bi leve of his gayler,
Was risen, and romed in a chambre an heigh,
In which he al the noble citee seigh,
And eek the gardyn ful of braunches grene,
Theras this fresshe Emelye the sheene
Was in hire walk, and romed up and down.
This sorweful prisoner, this Palamon,
Goth in the chambre, romynge to and fro,
And to hymself compleynynge of his wo;
That he was born, ful ofte he seyde, alas!
And so bifel, by aventure or cas,
That thurgh a wyndow, thikke of many a barre

Of iren, greet and square as any sparre,
He cast his eye upon Emelya,
And therwithal he bleynte and cryed, Al!
As though he stongen were unto the herte.
And with that cry Arcite anon upsterte,
And seyde, Cosyn myn, what eyleth thee,
That art so pale and deedly on to see?
Why cridestow? Who hath thee doon offence?
for Goddes love, taak al in pacience
Oure prisoun, for it may noon oother be;
fortune hath even us this adversitee.
Somme wikke aspect or disposicioun
Of Saturne, by sum constellacioun,
Hath even us this, although we hadde it sworn,
So stood the hevene whan that we were born;
We moste endure: this is the short and playn.
This Palamon answerde, and seyde agayn,
Cosyn, for sothe, of this opinioun
Thow hast a veyn ymaginacioun;
This prison caused me nat for to crye,
But I was hurt right now thurghout myn eye
Into myn herte, that wol my bane be.
The fairnesse of that lady that I see
Yond in the gardyn romen to and fro,
Is cause of al my crying and my wo.
I noot wher she be womman or goddesse;
But Venus is it, soothly, as I gesse.
And therwithal on knees down he fil,
And seyde, Venus, if it be thy wil
Yow in this gardyn thus to transfigure
Bifore me, sorweful wrecche creature,
Out of this prisoun helpe that we may scapen.
And if so be my destynce be shapen
By eterne word, to dyen in prisoun,
Of our lynage have som compassioun,
That is so lowe ybrought by tyrannye.
And with that word Arcite gan espye
Wheras this lady romed to and fro;
And with that sighte hir beautee hurte hym so,
That if that Palamon was wounded sore,
Arcite is hurt as moche as he, or moore;
And with a sigh he seyde pitously:
The fresshe beautee sleeth me sodeynly
Of hire that rometh in the yonder place,
And but I have hir mercy and hir grace
That I may seen hire atte leeste weye
I nam but deed; ther is namoore to seye.
This Palamon, whan he tho wordes herde,
Dispitously he looked and answerde,
Whether seistow this in earnest or in pley?
Nay, quod Arcite, in earnest, by my fey!
God helpe me so, me list ful yvele pleye.
This Palamon gan knytte his browes tweye,
It nere, quod he, to thee no greet honour,
for to be fals, ne for to be traitour
To me, that am thy cosyn and thy brother
Ysworn ful depe, and ech of us til oother,
That nevere for to dyen in the peyne,
Till that the deeth departe shal us tweyne,
Neither of us in love to hyndre oother
Ne in noon oother cas, my leewe brother,
But that thou sholdest trewely forthren me
In every cas, as I shal forthren thee.